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Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries: implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

Follow-up mechanism for coordinating, monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

Report of the Secretary-General*

Introduction

1. In paragraph 116 of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 (A/CONF.191/11), adopted by the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Brussels on 20 May 2001 and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/279 of 12 July 2001, the Secretary-General was requested to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session his recommendations for an efficient and highly visible follow-up mechanism, including the possibility to transform the current Office of the Special Coordinator for the Least Developed, Landlocked and Island Developing Countries into an Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

* The report is being submitted after the established deadline because General Assembly resolution 55/279 was only adopted on 12 July 2001 and extensive consultations had to take place before the report could be completed.

Programme of Action

2. The economic and social development of the least developed countries, which represent the poorest and weakest segment of the international community, continues to be a major challenge for those countries as well as for their development partners. Together with the landlocked developing countries and the small island developing States, they are characterized by their exposure to a series of vulnerabilities and constraints.

3. As noted in the Programme of Action, the objectives and goals set in 1990 have not been achieved. The existing arrangement for system-wide follow-up of the Programme of Action for the least developed countries has not been as effective as envisaged. The limitations of the current arrangement have been particularly evident with regard to the monitoring of implementation at the national level and throughout the United Nations system.

4. Following the adoption in September 1990 of the Paris Declaration at the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the General Assembly decided, in its resolution 45/206 of 21 December 1990, that, in cooperation with other



concerned organizations of the United Nations system, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), as part of its ongoing work, should continue to serve as the focal point for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action, the follow-up at the global level and support at the regional level. At the intergovernmental level, the Trade and Development Board was requested to review progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

5. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in close collaboration with the Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the secretariats of the regional commissions to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the implementation and follow-up of the Programme of Action. By virtue of the fact that 34 out of the 48 least developed countries were in Africa, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries was also involved in coordination functions.

6. The Programme of Action adopted in Brussels is different from previous programmes of action in terms of its objectives, orientation, scope and follow-up arrangements, and it provides a framework for a strong global partnership. Its overarching goal is to achieve substantial progress towards meeting the Millennium Declaration goal of reducing extreme poverty by half by 2015 (see General Assembly resolution 55/2) and to promote sustainable development. It focuses on seven areas of commitment:

- (a) Fostering a people-centred policy framework;
- (b) Good governance at the national and international levels;
- (c) Building human and institutional capacities;
- (d) Building productive capacities to make globalization work for the least developed countries;
- (e) Enhancing the role of trade and development;
- (f) Reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment;
- (g) Mobilizing financial resources.

Arrangements for follow-up

7. The Programme of Action acknowledges that success in attaining its objectives will depend on the effective functioning of the arrangements for implementation, follow-up, monitoring and review at the national, regional and global levels.

8. At the national level, each least developed country, with the support of its development partners, will translate actions contained in the Programme of Action into specific measures within their national development framework and poverty eradication strategy, including, where they exist, poverty eradication strategy papers, common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The regional-level follow-up should focus on cooperation between the least developed countries and other countries at the regional and subregional levels. At the global level, follow-up should be primarily concerned with assessing the economic and social performance of the least developed countries, monitoring the implementation of commitments by them and their partners, reviewing the functioning of implementation and follow-up mechanisms at the country, subregional, regional and sectoral levels and policy developments at the global level with implications for the least developed countries. The three-track approach is expected to function in a coherent and mutually supportive manner and to contribute to the coordinated follow-up of global summits and conferences and the United Nations Millennium Declaration, as well as other major initiatives.

9. The organizations of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, have a special role to play and are called upon to accord high priority to the Programme of Action and to integrate its provisions into their work programmes. The Secretary-General has been requested to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system to facilitate coordinated implementation as well as coherence in the follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action at all levels. The Administrative Committee on Coordination and the United Nations Development Group have been invited to consider means of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations system-wide follow-up and monitoring. The system of

focal points in the United Nations organizations would be a useful instrument in fulfilling this requirement.

10. At the country level, the United Nations system can assist in the promotion of an effective follow-up to the commitments of the Programme of Action, in particular within the framework of the resident coordinator system: this process needs to be further strengthened. At the regional level, the relevant United Nations regional commissions would continue to ensure that the needs and problems of the least developed countries, the landlocked developing countries and the small island developing States are addressed as part of their ongoing work and would also undertake periodic regional monitoring and review of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

11. As regards intergovernmental follow-up at the global level, the Programme of Action invites the General Assembly to continue monitoring the implementation of the Programme of Action under a specific item on its agenda and to consider conducting a comprehensive review of the Programme of Action at a time to be decided upon. The Assembly is also invited to consider holding a fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries for a comprehensive appraisal of its implementation.

12. Having considered paragraph 111 of the Programme of Action, the Economic and Social Council, in its decision 2001/320 of 24 October 2001, decided to establish in its agenda a sub-item entitled "Review and coordination of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010" under the item entitled "Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits". In the same decision, the Council also decided to consider, at a substantive session before 2005, devoting a high-level segment to the review and coordination of the implementation of the Programme of Action and to consider later in the decade further options for such review and coordination. These decisions reflect the importance attached to the need for an effective and efficient follow-up to the new Programme of Action and represent a significant step towards strengthening the monitoring of the implementation of the Programme of Action at all levels.

13. The governing bodies of the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as other multilateral organizations, have been invited to mainstream the implementation of the Programme of Action in their programme of work, as well as in their intergovernmental processes. The Trade and Development Board, at its forty-eighth session, held in Geneva in October 2001, responded to the invitation extended in paragraph 113 of the Programme of Action on the conversion of the Sessional Committee on the Least Developed Countries to a standing committee, and decided to begin consultations thereon in the context of the examination of the UNCTAD intergovernmental machinery, with a view to making a decision on the issue at the mid-term review of the tenth session of UNCTAD to be carried out in 2002.¹

14. Over the years, the functions of the system-wide structures involved in the follow-up mechanism have evolved or have been unable to fully discharge their responsibilities. For example, the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Cooperation has ceased to exist. Follow-up at the global level, which was one of the responsibilities entrusted to UNCTAD, could not be fully accomplished, mainly because the scope of the Programme of Action was beyond the mandate of any single organization. Moreover, UNCTAD does not have direct representation in United Nations country offices, which are in the best position to monitor implementation at the national level. It is not fair to burden organizations such as UNCTAD, which has an excellent and praiseworthy track record in assisting the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in its areas of expertise, with wider responsibilities as focal point for the implementation of a Programme of Action that covers a multitude of priority areas. While the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries has undertaken some activities on the least developed countries, the main focus of its work in recent years has been on African development, which is one of the priorities of the United Nations, including the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

15. The Brussels Programme of Action identified a critical need for an effective and highly visible mechanism for the follow-up of its implementation and for the full mobilization of the organizations of the

United Nations system and other multilateral organizations. The effectiveness of existing arrangements has to be improved and clearer and more rational allocations of responsibility for monitoring and follow-up put in place, taking into account the wider scope of the new Programme of Action.

Proposals for future follow-up mechanism

16. With the above considerations in mind, the General Assembly may wish to establish an Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The High Representative would be at the Under-Secretary-General level and would report directly to the Secretary-General. In addition to the position of the High Representative, the Office would comprise a Director at the D-2 level, 10 other Professional posts and 8 General Service posts (a total of 20 posts). For comparison purposes, the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, which also has coordination and advocacy functions, has a similar structure and a slightly higher staffing level. The Office of the High Representative would be responsible only for coordination, advocacy and reporting. Analytical and technical cooperation functions would continue to be carried out by other organizations in the United Nations system, including UNCTAD, in accordance with their mandates and comparative advantages. **The existing UNCTAD Trust Fund for the Least Developed Countries should continue to be an important vehicle for promoting technical cooperation activities and capacity-building in the least developed countries. Member States are urged to continue contributing generously to the Trust Fund.**

17. The key functions of the Office of the High Representative would be:

(a) To assist the Secretary-General in ensuring the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system, with a view to facilitating the coordinated implementation of and coherence in the follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries at the country, regional and global levels;

(b) To provide coordinated support to the Economic and Social Council as well as the General Assembly in assessing progress and in conducting the annual review of the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(c) To support, as appropriate, the coordinated follow-up of the implementation of the Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation between Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and the Donor Community² and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States;³

(d) To undertake appropriate advocacy work in favour of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in partnership with the relevant parts of the United Nations as well as with the civil society, media, academia and foundations;

(e) To assist in mobilizing international support and resources for the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and other programmes and initiatives for landlocked developing countries and small island developing States;

(f) To provide appropriate support to group consultations of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

18. In close collaboration with the executive heads of organizations of the United Nations system, the High Representative would assist the Secretary-General in ensuring that the Programme of Action is mainstreamed into the work of each organization. National-level implementation, which is a critical element in the success of the Programme of Action, would be monitored and supported through the United Nations Development Group and the resident coordinator system. The Office of the High Representative would also assist in strengthening the system of focal points for the least developed countries within individual United Nations organizations.

19. Bearing in mind the proposal that the High Representative should report directly to the Secretary-General, that the Office should have high visibility at the political level and that all least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States be represented in New York,

I am recommending that the Office be located at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Contacts with key organizations and entities such as the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Development Group, as well as with the Bretton Woods institutions, would also be facilitated.

20. In paragraph 116 of the Programme of Action, I was requested to include in my recommendations the possibility of transforming the current Office of the Special Coordinator for the Least Developed, Landlocked and Island Developing Countries into an Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. For 2002-2003, the Office of the Special Coordinator in UNCTAD will have a total of 17 Professional posts. As Member States are aware, the structure, mandate and functions of the Office have changed over the years. The Office was set up to coordinate substantive work on the least developed countries; to monitor the implementation of the Paris Programme of Action and of commitments, measures and recommendations agreed upon at the mid-term global review and recent global conferences; to mobilize resources for and administer the Trust Fund for the Least Developed Countries within UNCTAD; and to coordinate the preparation of annual reports on the least developed countries. The Office of the Special Coordinator was given responsibility for promoting the implementation of specific actions related to the particular needs and problems of landlocked and island developing States. It was also entrusted with the responsibility of providing substantive servicing to the Trade and Development Board in its review of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the least developed countries and in preparing inputs for the consideration of items on the least developed, landlocked and small island developing States by the General Assembly.

21. After a careful review of the initial mandate given to UNCTAD in 1990, subsequent changes and resources approved by Member States and the current functions of the Office of the Special Coordinator, I have decided not to propose the transformation of the entire Office into an Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. At the same time, taking into account the fact that the responsibility for system-wide coordination and supporting the annual review of progress and

implementation of the Programme of Action would be transferred to a new follow-up mechanism, **I am proposing that seven Professional posts and three General Service posts be transferred from the Office of the Special Coordinator to the new Office of the High Representative.** The remaining 10 Professional posts in the Office of the Special Coordinator, together with other resources approved for the specific benefit of support to the least developed, landlocked and small island developing States will continue to be used by UNCTAD to provide support to those categories of countries in its areas of expertise.

22. There will obviously be a need to make some readjustments in the functions of the Office of the Special Coordinator and also to change its denomination. It should be recalled that the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget of the Trade and Development Board, when considering section 11A, Trade and development, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (A/56/6 (Sect. 11A)), decided at its session in June 2001 to review the impact on the system-wide coordination aspects contained in subprogramme 5, Least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, of the decisions of the General Assembly based on the recommendations to be made by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session for an efficient and highly visible mechanism for the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Working Party will meet for this purpose in January 2002. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD will review the title and functions of the current UNCTAD Office for Special Coordinator, and the Working Party will be invited to review modifications to subprogramme 5 in the light of the decisions of the General Assembly on the recommendations set out in the present report.

23. As some resources have been allocated to the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries in connection with its responsibility for the least developed countries, **I am also proposing the transfer of two Professional posts and one General Service post from the Office of the Special Coordinator to the proposed Office of the High Representative.** There will be a total of nine Professional posts in the Office of the Special Coordinator for 2002-2003, of which two would be

newly established. A new General Service post would also be established.

24. **The balance of posts would need to be filled through secondments from other United Nations system organizations or from extrabudgetary resources, or should be proposed as new established posts.** I shall be consulting with my colleagues in the United Nations system to identify how many of these posts could be filled through secondment. **I would also wish to appeal to interested Member States to consider funding some of these posts with extrabudgetary resources to show solidarity with the least developed, landlocked and small island developing States.**

25. The international community has a responsibility to adopt the necessary support measures to reverse the marginalization of the least developed, landlocked and small island developing States and to promote their expeditious integration into the world economy. The primary responsibility rests with the countries themselves, but progress can be made only with the full collaboration and assistance of their development partners. The effective functioning of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States would depend critically on the cooperation and collaboration of all parts of the United Nations system, as well as other relevant multilateral organizations, particularly those that have a long record of work on these categories of countries. For my part, I shall ensure that the United Nations system fulfil its responsibilities in a coordinated and effective manner, and it is in this spirit that I have submitted the recommendations contained in the present report.

26. The budgetary implications of the proposals outlined in the present report will be contained in an addendum.

Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution I, annex II).

Notes

¹ See A/56/15 (Part III), decision 467 (XLVIII).

² TD/B/42(1)/11-TD/B/LDC/AC.1/7, annex I.

³ Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (*Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994* (United Nations publication,